

CHRIST IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Today is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. Sheep and shepherds were a major part of the economy and culture of the Middle East in Jesus' time, and they still are. So, when Jesus wanted to teach some difficult lesson, he could explain it by using farming and shepherding as an example.

Today's example is about the sheep gate. The gate was important in that it kept the sheep from wandering or getting stolen by robbers or getting killed by wolves. In that sense the gate was protective. It also had the function of letting the shepherd take the sheep out to give them a field where they could graze and a stream where they could drink. In this sense, the gate allowed the shepherd to provide for the sheep.

The gate represents Jesus, and as the gate is the only way into the sheepfold, Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God. The second point he makes is that his sheep hear his voice. We are truly his followers only if we listen to him. There are ways he gave us by which we can hear his voice: prayer and Scripture and in the voices of those who speak his truth. One who speaks the truth may be a person we like as well as a person we dislike; one who speaks the truth may be a wise friend, a parent, a neighbor, a saint like Mother Theresa, or someone who may not be a saint at all but whose words are true.

Somehow when we are in the habit of listening for Jesus' voice through prayer and Scripture, we come to recognize Jesus' words when they come to us through other sources.

We come to church daily or on Sunday precisely to see this one who has made abundant life possible for us, to hear his story, to realize it is our story, and to prepare ourselves to live that story out in the world during the week. We have been baptized into his Body. Now we come to share his Body in the Eucharist as we remember his sacrifice and his service. **He who is the sacrament for us now makes us the sacrament for the world.**

We who have entered by the door become the door of opportunity for others to know they are loved and cared for. Christ becomes our model for ministry, whether clergy or laity. Let us pray, then, that, like Christ the door, we will be open to the world, not closed and locked against all those for whom he died.

We pray in a special way on this Good Shepherd Sunday, that those who have wandered far from the flock of God, whether through hurt or through apathy, rediscover their gateway to God. May we be open to the call for repentance, attune our minds to the sound of Jesus' voice in more than just our immediate concerns, and allow him to shepherd us through life especially lead us safely through this pandemic, knowing that we are all each brothers' keeper.

A story is told that, during World War I, some Turkish soldiers tried to steal a flock of sheep from a hillside near Jerusalem. The shepherd, who had been sleeping, suddenly awakened to see his sheep being driven off on the other side of the ravine. He could not hope to recapture his flock by force single-handedly, but suddenly he had a thought. Standing up on his side of the ravine, he put his hands to his mouth and gave his own peculiar call, which he used each day to gather his sheep to him. The sheep heard the familiar sound. For a moment they listened and then, hearing it again, they turned and rushed down one side of the ravine and up the other toward their shepherd. It was quite impossible for the soldiers to stop the animals. The shepherd was away with them to a place of safety before the soldiers could make up their minds to pursue them—and all because his sheep knew their master's voice. *We continue to pray that we may always HEAR and heed HIS Voice! Amen.*